

Let's Shed Some Light on Shedding Pets

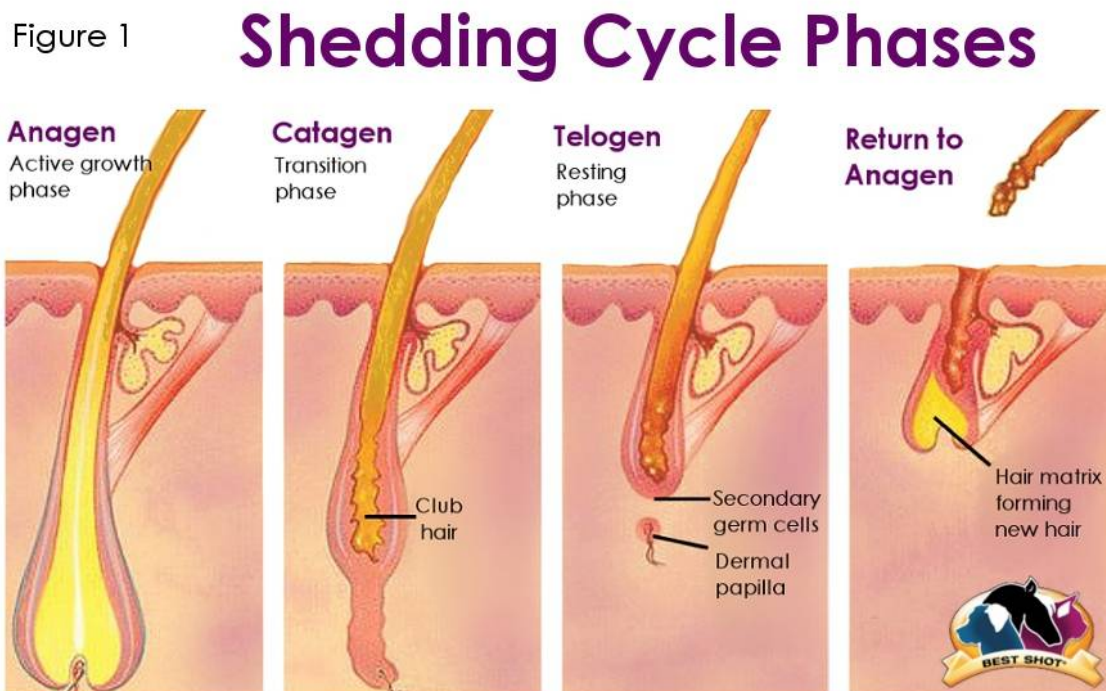
by Dave Campanella

Shedding pet hair, or 'molting' as it is sometimes referred, is a leading concern most dog and cat lovers deal with. For those with allergies, shedding can aggravate serious health issues often dictating whether or not pet ownership is even possible.

Why Must Pets Shed?

Admittedly most of us have no idea why our furry companions shed their hair in the first place. The question we've all asked at some point is, "Can shedding be stopped?" Unfortunately the answer is a resounding "NO". Now don't get discouraged just yet. Shedding can be mindfully managed with many of today's advanced grooming liquids, sprays, and methods. It also helps to know some facts about shedding and the intelligent design revealed by how an animal's coat actually works. This knowledge leads to better application methods for optimal results.

Every dog or cat with a coat sheds its hair. It's merely a progressive cycle that occurs naturally on its own. So what's 'normal' and what's 'excessive'? Well this varies vastly from pet to pet. Many factors like hormones, gender, environment, stress, health, diet, genetics, neutered/spayed or not... will not only affect coat quality, but shedding volume and molting patterns too. Below figure 1 defines each phase of the shedding cycle.



Unlike human hair which grows one strand per follicle, dogs and cats can grow several strands per follicle. (See figure 2) Pet coats and fur primarily protect the skin and help regulate body temperature. When the coat is wet; water is blocked from getting down to the skin by hairs naturally coated in oil. Hair and fur can also act as armor to defend from sustaining injuries.

Types of Pet Hair Strands

1) Primary Hair Shaft

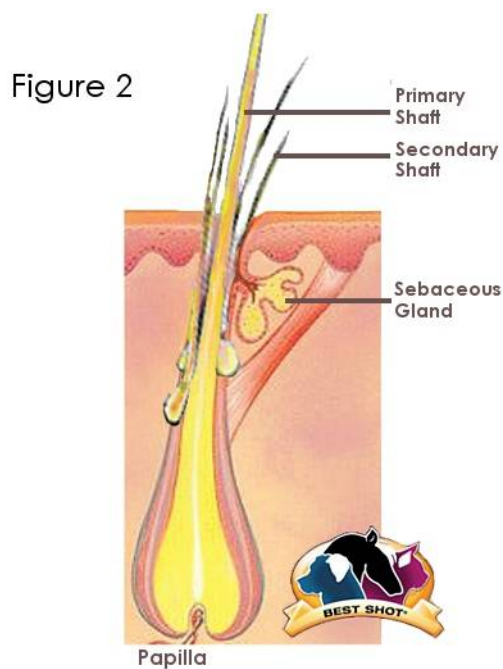
Known also as 'Guard' hairs or 'Outercoat', these strands are long, shiny, stiff and, dependent on the breed, can be soft or coarse. They protect the skin from water penetration and the Sun's rays.

2) Secondary Hair Shaft

Known also as 'Undercoat' or 'Underfur', these strands provide an insulated coat layer that is short, fluffy, and thick. Typically one finds undercoat on breeds that live in colder climates. Some canines and felines from more temperate climates will have an undercoat for winter months, then shed it in the Spring.

3) Whiskers

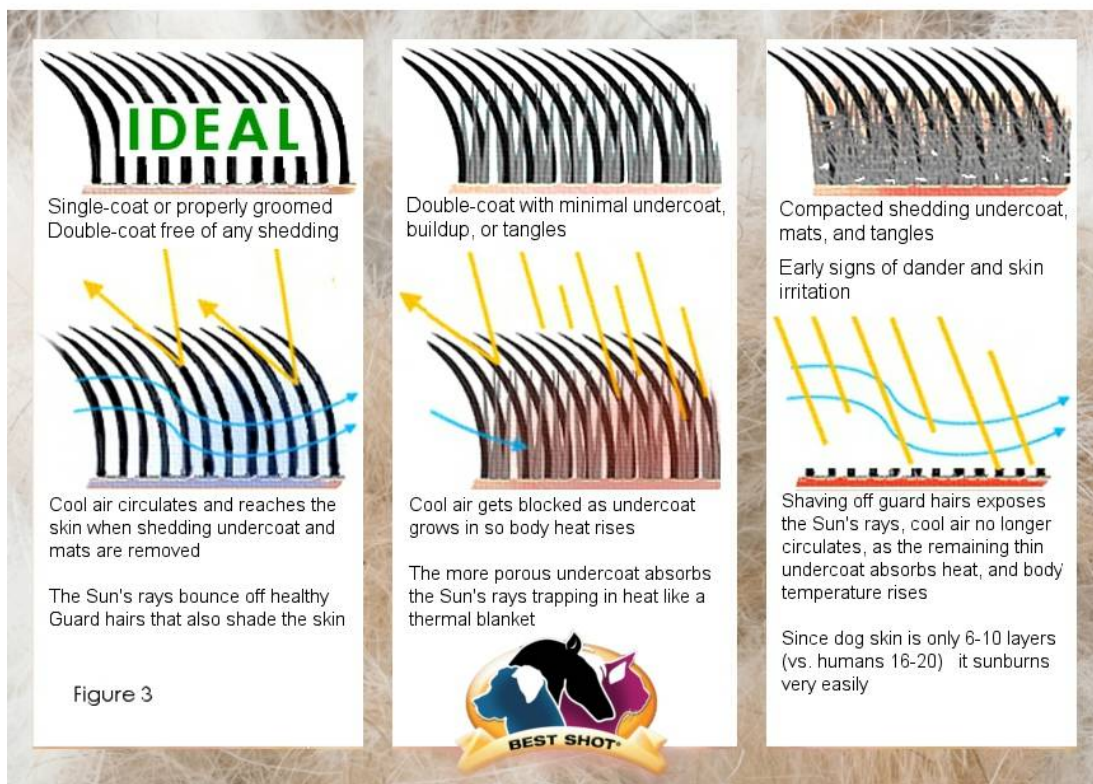
Whiskers grow to help dogs and cats with sensing their surroundings and for balance depending on its breed.



The biggest difference between 'heavy shedders' and those breeds that tend to hang on to their hair (often referred to as hypoallergenic breeds) is the kind of coat they possess. For example a 'double-coated' breed, has longer guard hairs (for waterproofing and protection) with a soft, downy undercoat (to block air and keep them warm and insulated).

In the canine world, double-coated breeds include dogs of all types and sizes like Border Collies, German Shepherds, Labradors, Malamutes, Pomeranians, Samoyeds, and Shiba Inus to name a few. These breed types and their mixes typically shed a lot of hair year-round.

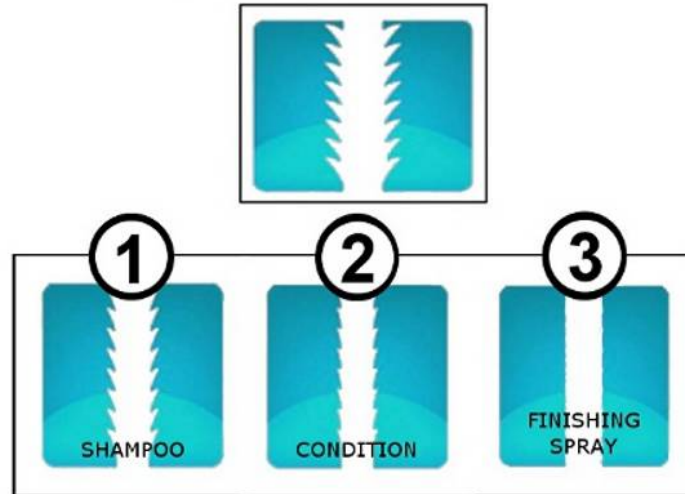
How Dog and Cat Coats Work



The skin's glands produce sebum, a naturally oily substance which protects hair and seals in moisture. For many breeds this is essential for waterproofing, regulating body temperature, and protecting the skin. Unfortunately sebum is a virtual dirt magnet, attracting unwanted debris and oils.

Shampoo works by removing the sebum along with other oily debris that accumulates. Washing can undoubtedly strip away the hairs protective sebum resulting in dry lifted cuticles that trap shedding undercoat. If left unmanaged, shedding nightmares soon occur as depicted in figure 3. Remember after shampooing to follow-up with an appropriate conditioner to release any trapped shedding.

Closing lifted cuticle scales along each hair's shaft is secret to safely managing shedding. It further releases already shedded undercoat trapped by lifted cuticles. Manipulating these cuticles is also essential to general maintenance, achieving more manageable coat, and producing desired coat finish or shine.



Therefore routine conditioning is one's best defense against shedding. Best Shot's conditioners act as a superior sebum replacement, repelling oil and debris rather than attracting it. They help manage Coat Porosity by closing cuticles, rehydrating, and extending manageability. Best of all they safely release shedding undercoat in the tub and with one's force dryer, reducing any unnecessary pulling, tugging and tearing.

Dog Breeds That Shed Most:

The breed examples below have hair shafts with short life spans. It is this short life span that causes continuous hair shedding all year round:

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|--------------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Akita | Welsh Corgi | Chihuahua |
| Border Collie | St. Bernard | German Shepherd |
| Labrador Retriever | Chow Chow | Rottweiler |
| Pug | | |

Hypoallergenic Dogs:

The following breed examples shed very little because they have hair shafts with longer life spans. Many are still prone to tangles and mats nonetheless.

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|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Yorkshire Terrier | Bichon Frise | Shih Tzu |
| Poodle | Italian Greyhound | Scottish Terrier |
| Lakeland Terrier | Afghan Hound | Wheaten Terrier |
| Miniature Schnauzer | Giant Schnauzer | Portuguese Water Dog |

Dave Campanella is an informative and entertaining seminar speaker, contributing trade columnist and genuine grooming enthusiast. He is Best Shot Pet Products sales and marketing director and has over 30 years of pet industry knowledge and experience. He and his wife Tracy co-owned a full-service pet salon and self-wash in Ohio prior to relocating with Best Shot to Kentucky. Together they enjoy exhibiting at grooming shows, being industry ambassadors and showing their Kerry Blues, Lowland Polish Sheepdog, and Sammy.